

My Philosophy of Life

By Philo Sofer (email: philosofer123@yahoo.com)

Revised as of June 5, 2017

Latest version available at <http://philosofer123.wordpress.com> and <http://www.scribd.com/doc/183418623/My-Philosophy-of-Life>

Introduction

- The primary purpose of this document is to advise myself on how to live well
- In the first six pages, I present and defend philosophical positions that are relevant to living well. The remainder of the document provides specific advice on how to live well.
- While I am comfortable with my philosophical positions, I am not certain of any of them

List of my philosophical positions

- Atheism
- Afterlife skepticism
- Ultimate responsibility impossibilism
- Moral skepticism
- Existential skepticism
- Thanatophobic irrationalism
- Negative hedonism

Atheism

- I define “atheism” as the view that it is highly implausible that the Abrahamic God exists, and that there is no good reason to believe that any other god exists
 - I define “the Abrahamic God” as the disembodied, omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent creator of the universe, who wants all humans to believe in him
- There is a presumption of atheism because theists propose the addition of a major metaphysical entity (the Abrahamic God) to what is already known to exist (the physical universe). That is, theists make an extraordinary claim, and extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence.
- None of the standard arguments for the existence of the Abrahamic God are persuasive, as they are all subject to damaging objections. For detail, please see the recommended reading below.
- There are a number of effective arguments for atheism, briefly summarized as follows:
 - Evidential argument from suffering
 - Attempts to reconcile the existence of the actual amount of suffering with the existence of an omnipotent, omniscient, omnibenevolent creator have all failed
 - Skeptical theism—the assertion that human cognitive limitations prevent one from determining whether any particular instance of suffering is gratuitous—does not significantly reduce the force of the evidential argument from suffering. As it is highly implausible that every single instance of suffering in the world is logically necessary to produce some future compensating good, the evidential argument from suffering continues to show that it is highly implausible that the Abrahamic God exists.
 - Arguments from faulty design

- The slow evolution of life on earth, involving disastrous trial and error, is evidence against the existence of an omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator
 - The fact that humans require an easily damaged brain is evidence against the existence of a disembodied, omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator: if God has a mind without a brain, why would he not create humans the same way?
 - The design of humans, and nature generally, is wasteful and messy, inefficient and full of needless vulnerabilities and imperfections, pitfalls and limitations. Such flawed design is evidence against an omnipotent, omnibenevolent creator.
 - Argument from reasonable nonbelief
 - If God is omnipotent and wants all humans to believe in him, then why has he not made it so obvious that he exists that every reasonable person believes?
- For further reading, I recommend:
 - *Atheism: A Philosophical Justification*, by Michael Martin
 - *The Miracle of Theism*, by J. L. Mackie
 - *Atheism Explained*, by David Ramsay Steele

Afterlife skepticism

- Afterlife skepticism is the view that it is highly implausible that there is an afterlife
 - I define “afterlife” as consciousness after brain death
- There is no reliable scientific evidence of consciousness after brain death. At the same time, there is plenty of scientific evidence that all aspects of consciousness (sense impressions, emotions, thoughts, memories, etc.) depend completely upon a live and functioning brain, and that different aspects of consciousness depend upon different neural structures within the brain. This indicates that consciousness ends with brain death.
- Consciousness after brain death appears to require the existence of immaterial souls. But there are effective arguments against the existence of immaterial souls:
 - A soul that houses one’s essence must be able to interact with the body (and particularly with the brain). But how can an immaterial entity interact with a material entity? First, such interaction would appear to be impossible. And second, such interaction would violate the causal closure of the physical, a principle of which no violation has ever been found.
 - Argument from evolution
 - Unless either (A) immaterial souls were present throughout the evolutionary chain from single-celled organisms to humans or (B) immaterial souls are an emergent phenomenon arising from evolutionary processes or (C) immaterial souls sprang into existence at some point in the evolutionary chain, it is highly implausible that immaterial souls exist
 - (A), (B) and (C) are each highly implausible on atheism
 - Therefore, it is highly implausible that immaterial souls exist
- For further reading, I recommend:
 - *The Myth of an Afterlife*, edited by Michael Martin and Keith Augustine
 - *The Soul Fallacy*, by Julien Musolino
 - *The Illusion of Immortality*, by Corliss Lamont

Ultimate responsibility impossibilism

- Ultimate responsibility impossibilism is the view that one cannot be ultimately responsible for any of one's actions
 - One is "ultimately responsible" for X if and only if X cannot be fully expressed as a function of factors that are entirely outside of one's control
- When one acts intentionally, what one does is a function of how one is, mentally speaking. Therefore, to be ultimately responsible for one's action, one must be ultimately responsible for how one is, mentally speaking—at least in certain respects. But to be ultimately responsible for how one is in the relevant respects, one must have chosen to become (or intentionally brought it about that one would become) that way in the past. But if one chose to become that way, then one's choice was a function of the way one was in certain mental respects. Therefore, to be ultimately responsible for *that* choice, one would need to be ultimately responsible for being *that* way. But this process results in a vicious regress. Therefore, one cannot be ultimately responsible for any of one's intentional actions. And one clearly cannot be ultimately responsible for any of one's unintentional actions. Therefore, one cannot be ultimately responsible for any of one's actions.
- More concisely, ultimate responsibility requires ultimate self-origination, which is impossible
- For further reading, I recommend:
 - *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will*, by Robert Kane
 - "Free Will," entry by Galen Strawson in the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*
 - *Freedom and Belief*, by Galen Strawson

Moral skepticism

- Moral skepticism is the view that it is highly implausible that moral facts exist
 - Therefore, under moral skepticism, it is highly implausible that anything is "good" or "bad" or "right" or "wrong" or "just" or "unjust" or "moral" or "immoral"
- If moral facts existed, they would be metaphysically queer. They would have inescapable practical authority, which is to say that they would provide normative reasons for action that are independent of one's desires and interests. At the same time, they would be non-natural, since moral naturalism cannot account for the categorical quality of moral requirements.
- Positing the existence of such metaphysically queer entities amounts to an extraordinary claim, and extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence. But the only apparent evidence for this claim is our (so-called) shared moral intuition, which is plausibly explained by evolution, without invoking moral facts.
 - Plausible evolutionary explanations are available for sympathy, empathy and disgust, for norms of reciprocity, fairness and justice, and for moral belief. For detail, please see the recommended reading below (particularly Joyce and Tomasello).
- For further reading, I recommend:
 - *Moral Error Theory*, by Jonas Olson
 - *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong*, by J. L. Mackie
 - *The Myth of Morality*, by Richard Joyce
 - *The Evolution of Morality*, by Richard Joyce
 - *A Natural History of Human Morality*, by Michael Tomasello
 - *A Very Bad Wizard*, by Tamler Sommers
 - *Beyond Morality*, by Richard Garner

Existential skepticism

- Existential skepticism is the view that it is highly implausible that life has *inherent* meaning, purpose or value
- Existential skepticism follows from the combination of atheism, afterlife skepticism, ultimate responsibility impossibilism and moral skepticism
 - According to this combination of views and modern science, life is an accidental and transient phenomenon that is devoid of ultimate responsibility and moral value. As such, it is difficult to imagine what inherent meaning, purpose or value that life could possibly have.
- However, *one's* life may still have *subjective* meaning, purpose and/or value, and one may still *subjectively* value the lives of others
- For further reading, I recommend Part Two of *The Specter of the Absurd*, by Donald A. Crosby, 1988

Thanatophobic irrationalism

- Thanatophobic irrationalism is the view that the fear of death is irrational
 - I define “death” as the ending of the dying process—the loss of the very last trace of life. As such, death is virtually instantaneous.
- Death is usually harmful for the one who dies
 - Death is usually harmful for the one who dies because death prevents a scenario that one would usually prefer—namely, a scenario in which one lives longer than one actually does
 - The harm of death for the one who dies has two potential components:
 - Deprivation of future pleasant states of mind
 - Indirect harm from harming those about whom one cares
 - However, death is not always harmful for the one who dies, as there are cases in which one would truly be “better off dead” (if the remainder of one’s life were virtually certain to be spent with a very disturbed mind)
 - In these cases, suicide is rational—assuming that one’s expected future suffering outweighs both one’s subjective value of staying alive and one’s concern for those who would suffer if one committed suicide
 - However, a disciplined mind requires little to maintain peace of mind. Additionally, it is quite difficult to predict how one will feel in the future, and people tend to underestimate their resilience, so a strong bias against suicide is appropriate.
- That said, it is irrational to fear death
 - It is irrational to fear death because it is irrational to fear either of the potential components of the harm of death listed above
 - Regarding deprivation of future pleasant states of mind, such deprivation cannot be experienced because the state of being dead cannot be experienced (according to afterlife skepticism). And it is irrational to fear a deprivation that cannot be experienced.
 - Regarding indirect harm from harming those about whom one cares, one may justifiably anticipate one’s death with a touch of sadness, but fear makes no sense
- For further reading, I recommend:
 - *The Metaphysics of Death*, edited by John Martin Fischer
 - *Death*, by Shelly Kagan
 - *The Philosophy of Death*, by Steven Luper

Negative hedonism

- I define “negative hedonism” as the view that the best way to go about living well is to aim for the achievement and maintenance of one’s peace of mind
 - Negative hedonism is supported by the conjunction of Theses 1, 2 and 3 below
- *Thesis 1*: “Living well” is equivalent to “living in accordance with the preponderance of one’s ultimate motivational considerations”
 - “Living well” is living how one should live—that is, living in accordance with the preponderance of normative reasons. On moral skepticism, the only normative reasons for action are those that are dependent upon one’s desires and interests. And one’s ultimate motivational considerations comprise the foundation of one’s desires and interests.
- *Thesis 2*: Optimizing one’s state of mind over one’s lifetime is the ultimate goal that best fits all plausible ultimate motivational considerations
 - “Optimizing one’s state of mind over one’s lifetime” may be roughly interpreted as “feeling as good as possible for as much of the time as possible”
 - The combination of atheism, afterlife skepticism, moral skepticism and existential skepticism eliminates all plausible ultimate motivational considerations other than self-interest in this life and concern for other sentient beings
 - I find this true by introspection, and it may be supported by a plausible evolutionary account of human motivation
 - Of course, one may have different levels of concern for different sentient beings. For example, one may have more concern for one’s family than for strangers.
 - Optimizing one’s state of mind over one’s lifetime is the ultimate goal that best fits the ultimate motivational considerations of self-interest in this life and concern for other sentient beings
 - With respect to self-interest in this life, all prudent goals ultimately reduce to optimizing one’s state of mind over one’s lifetime (by repeatedly asking and answering “Why does one want X? For Y. Why does one want Y? (etc.)”)
 - Empathic/sympathetic feelings (if one has them) incorporate the welfare of other sentient beings into one’s own state of mind. And the greater one’s concern for a particular sentient being, the stronger one’s empathic/sympathetic feelings for that being. Therefore, optimizing one’s state of mind over one’s lifetime usually takes into account adequately both one’s concern for other sentient beings and one’s different levels of concern for different sentient beings.
- *Thesis 3*: The most effective way of which I am aware to optimize one’s state of mind over one’s lifetime is to aim for the achievement and maintenance of one’s peace of mind
 - I define “peace of mind” as the absence of significant negative emotions, while still retaining one’s mental faculties
 - I define “negative emotion” as any emotion that feels uncomfortable. Examples may include distress, fear, frustration, anger, boredom and regret, among others.
 - Peace of mind is the minimally self-sufficient state of mind, so aiming for anything less would be unsatisfactory
 - Peace of mind is a self-sufficient state of mind because it precludes the need or desire to feel any better. This is because such a need or desire would cause frustration, thereby disturbing one’s mind.
 - Peace of mind is the *minimally* self-sufficient state of mind because if one does not have peace of mind, then one will desire peace of mind, which precludes self-sufficiency

- Peace of mind is the best enduring state of mind to which one can reasonably aspire, so aiming for anything more would be unrealistic and/or counterproductive
 - Peace of mind is the best enduring state of mind to which one can reasonably aspire because (1) eliminating *all* negative emotions is unrealistic, and (2) positive emotions are temporary in nature. I define “positive emotion” as any emotion that feels pleasurable.
 - For at least most people, a policy of aiming for intense positive emotions would be counterproductive, since the totality of positive emotions produced by such a policy would likely be outweighed by the totality of negative emotions and/or loss of life arising from such a policy
 - While positive emotions may evacuate negative emotions from one’s mind, this effect is only temporary. Therefore, one is better served by striving to achieve a sustainable peace of mind than by continually chasing positive emotions.
- Aiming for peace of mind is much simpler and easier than trying to optimize one’s state of mind over one’s lifetime directly
 - The former involves only a focus on eliminating negative emotions, while the latter requires simultaneous consideration of both positive and negative emotions over time
- Peace of mind facilitates the production of positive emotions
 - Peace of mind makes it easier to savor the small pleasures in life
 - Peace of mind facilitates the cultivation of positive interpersonal relationships
- In situations where one doubts that aiming for peace of mind would be in accordance with the preponderance of one’s ultimate motivational considerations, one may appeal directly to those considerations. When one’s ultimate motivational considerations conflict, one simply takes the course of action that has the greatest motivational pull, as there is no further standard that one can employ to adjudicate between different ultimate motivational considerations.

Achieving and maintaining peace of mind

- My philosophical positions promote peace of mind in a variety of ways
 - Atheism precludes negative emotions (such as fear and anger) directed toward God
 - Afterlife skepticism precludes fear of an unpleasant afterlife, as well as fear of ghosts
 - Ultimate responsibility impossibilism renders irrational a whole range of negative emotions, including guilt, regret, shame, remorse, indignation, anger, outrage, resentment, contempt and hatred
 - When one realizes that all of one’s actions can be fully expressed as a function of factors that are entirely outside of one’s control, all of these emotions are rendered irrational
 - However, with respect to one’s own past actions that may have hurt others, one may still apologize, attempt to rectify the situation, and vow to act differently in the future. And with respect to others’ hurtful actions, one may still respond for the sake of deterrence.
 - Moral skepticism precludes dismay, disgust, frustration and anxiety related to moral judgments
 - Existential skepticism precludes anxiety caused by a disconnect between events and what one would otherwise judge to be the meaning or purpose of life
 - Thanatophobic irrationalism can reduce or eliminate the fear of death
- Taking physical care of oneself promotes peace of mind

- Such care prolongs one's life and enhances one's ability to deal with stress
- One should eat nutritious and balanced meals, exercise daily, and get adequate sleep
- Cultivating self-sufficiency promotes peace of mind
 - Dependence on others (whether it be emotional, psychological, financial, physical or otherwise) makes one vulnerable to a variety of circumstances that can disturb one's mind
- Cultivating friendships promotes peace of mind
 - Good friends provide one with the assurance of assistance in times of need. Such assurance can significantly reduce anxiety and fear.
 - Good friends provide companionship, which can reduce loneliness and boredom
 - As a bonus, good friends also promote positive emotions such as love and camaraderie, enhance one's self-knowledge, and foster self-acceptance
- Living a simple life promotes peace of mind
 - The simpler one's life, the fewer things that can go wrong and disturb one's mind
 - A simple life is typically inexpensive, which minimizes financial worries and obviates the need for a high income
 - As examples, all of the following increase the complexity of one's life, and the benefits of such actions (in terms of state of mind) should be weighed against the costs:
 - Getting married
 - Having children
 - Buying a house
 - Taking on a managerial position
 - Getting involved in politics
- Cultivating flexibility promotes peace of mind
 - Flexibility enables one to cope more effectively in a wide range of circumstances
- Certain daily habits promote peace of mind
 - Relaxing while listening to music
 - Enjoying the outdoors
 - Conversing with a friend
 - Meditating
 - Practicing gratitude (reminding oneself of those things for which one feels fortunate)
 - Sleeping in a cool room (helps reduce the incidence of stressful dreams)
- A number of realizations and psychological methods promote peace of mind
 - Realization that peace of mind ultimately comes from within
 - It is not events or states of affairs themselves that disturb one's mind, but rather one's judgments concerning those events or states of affairs—so altering or eliminating one's judgments (see "Elimination of judgments" below) should promote peace of mind
 - One should strive to accept reality and be content with the way things are
 - Realization that negative emotions worsen one's overall situation
 - This realization can counteract a variety of negative emotions
 - Recognizing and analyzing negative emotions as they arise
 - The more quickly one recognizes the intrusion of negative emotions, the more quickly one can apply the methods for eliminating them described herein
 - Upon recognizing a negative emotion, one should attempt to determine its source(s). Each source may then be addressed.
 - Focusing on the positive

- One should always try to focus on the positive aspects of any given situation, and not dwell on the negative aspects
 - For example, following the premature death of a loved one, one should celebrate that individual's life rather than lamenting his death. In the same vein, one should focus on one's gratitude for the time one was able to spend with that individual, rather than on the fact that no more such time is available.
- Elimination of judgments
 - One should always keep in mind that events are interconnected through the operation of physical cause and effect. Thus, apparently negative events can precipitate positive events, and apparently positive events can precipitate negative events. Moreover, the connections between events can be very indirect and impossible to predict. Consequently, if one were able to go back in time and modify or eliminate a particular event, one's entire life might change as a result, and whether it would change for the better or the worse would not be knowable.
 - Therefore, one will generally never know whether an apparently negative event is truly negative in the overall context of one's life, or whether an apparently positive event is truly positive in the overall context of one's life
 - As a result, one should eliminate judgments with respect to whether any event is truly positive or negative. Such elimination of judgments strongly promotes equanimity and peace of mind—before, during and after one's experiences.
- Recognition of impermanence
 - All experiences and emotions are temporary. Always remember that “this too shall pass.”
 - With the recognition of impermanence, one will be less inclined to cling to people, objects, or states of affairs. As a result, when these entities change or disappear, one's mind will not be disturbed.
- Recognition of triviality
 - Most events are trivial in the overall context of one's life. Therefore, it is irrational to allow such events to disturb one's mind.
 - In fact, the inevitability and finality of death (according to afterlife skepticism) may render *all* of one's concerns trivial. In this way, meditating on one's death promotes peace of mind.
 - From the perspective of the cosmos, the Earth is merely a speck of dust floating in the void, destined for annihilation. Adopting such a perspective may enable one to take both oneself and one's projects less seriously, thereby reducing anxiety and frustration.
- Elimination of expectations
 - With the realization that the future is uncertain, one should eliminate one's expectations regarding future events—and particularly regarding complex events, such as the actions of another
 - Elimination of one's expectations prevents surprise and disappointment, thereby helping one to accept reality
 - Also, elimination of one's expectations promotes the cultivation of flexibility (see above), as it helps one to be mentally prepared for a variety of outcomes
- Negative visualization
 - This is the practice of visualizing things going wrong, which should prevent shock when they do go wrong

- Letting go of the past
 - The past is gone forever, so it makes no sense for past events to affect one's present state of mind
 - One cannot change the past, so it makes no sense to dwell on the past
- Dichotomy of control
 - Some things are at least partially under one's control, and some things are not
 - Realize that it is irrational to worry about what is not under one's control, as rational worry is caused by the feeling that one is not doing one's best to avoid something harmful
 - If avoiding something harmful is at least partially under one's control, then simply do one's best to avoid it—beyond that, it is not under one's control (and it is therefore irrational to worry)
- Living in the present
 - Since neither the past nor the future currently exist, they should not negatively affect one's present state of mind
 - With respect to backward-looking negative emotions, see "Letting go of the past" above
 - With respect to forward-looking negative emotions, see "Dichotomy of control" above
 - At a minimum, concentrating on the present moment should crowd out disturbing emotions relating to the past (such as regret) and the future (such as fear or worry)
 - One effective way of concentrating on the present is to focus on one's immediate physical sensations
 - Of course, while living in the present, one may still learn from the past and prepare for the future
- Recognizing the emotional effects of physical discomfort
 - Realize that negative emotions may sometimes be caused by physical discomfort. For example, when uncomfortably warm or hungry, one may be particularly susceptible to anger or frustration.
 - With this realization, it should be easier to dispense with these negative emotions
 - Also, remedying the physical discomfort should help eliminate the associated negative emotions
- Focusing the mind on thoughts that crowd out or counteract negative emotions
 - This can be done every time one recognizes the intrusion of a negative emotion
 - These could be general thoughts, or thoughts designed to counteract specific (types of) negative emotions
 - Examples of general crowding-out thoughts: engaging in philosophical contemplation, reminding oneself of those things for which one feels fortunate, focusing on one's love for a loved one, recalling pleasant memories, and imagining a tranquil and beautiful landscape
 - An effective way to clear the mind is to ask oneself, "What will be my next thought?"
- Conquering boredom and loneliness
 - Boredom is an unmet desire for mental and/or physical stimulation
 - Boredom arises in part from the false belief that satisfaction comes from outside oneself. With the realization that satisfaction comes from within, the desire for stimulation can usually be eliminated.

- Boredom sometimes involves a state of high arousal. In such cases, one may lower one's state of arousal by meditating or listening to relaxing music.
 - Loneliness is an unmet desire for companionship
 - This desire can be eliminated by becoming comfortable with oneself. Becoming comfortable with oneself involves fostering unconditional self-acceptance, achieving deep self-knowledge, and cultivating robust self-reliance.
 - Boredom and loneliness are mutually reinforcing. Therefore, eliminating one may help in eliminating the other.
- Neutralizing insults and humiliation
 - Insults and other non-physical harms cause suffering only if one takes offense
 - One may therefore maintain peace of mind by choosing not to take offense
 - Additionally, one can be offended only if one has a related insecurity
 - Therefore, to the extent one eliminates one's insecurities, one renders oneself immune to offense
 - One may eliminate one's insecurities by accepting oneself, one's situation, and one's limitations. This can be done by (1) realizing that one cannot be ultimately responsible for the way one is (according to ultimate responsibility impossibilism), (2) curtailing one's desires (see "Questioning the rationality of one's desires" above), and (3) eliminating judgments (see "Elimination of judgments" above).
 - Humiliation (being brought down in the eyes of oneself or others) causes suffering only if one experiences regret, anger, and/or frustration
 - But ultimate responsibility impossibilism can eliminate regret and anger (see above), while elimination of judgments (see above) can remove frustration. As a result, humiliation can be neutralized.
- Deconstruction of grief
 - Grief, as a sense of loss, comprises two components—self-pity and empathic suffering. The former is suffering due to the loss experienced by the griever, while the latter is suffering due to the loss experienced by the deceased.
 - Self-pity, in turn, can be disaggregated into components such as fear, sadness, loneliness and boredom. These components are dealt with elsewhere in this document.
 - Empathic suffering may be dealt with by employing methods outlined in this document, including elimination of judgments, focusing on the positive, recognition of impermanence, living in the present, and selective emotional detachment
 - Other negative emotions that may accompany grief, such as guilt, regret, anger, frustration and outrage, are dealt with elsewhere in this document
- Diminishing the trade-off between present and future peace of mind
 - At first blush, it may seem that there are significant trade-offs between one's present and future peace of mind. For example, hard work (potentially disturbing one's mind) may be required to achieve financial security (future peace of mind).
 - However, a disciplined mind will not be disturbed by hard work, and will require little to maintain peace of mind in the future

- In general, the more disciplined one's mind, the less pronounced the trade-off between present and future peace of mind
 - Meditation
 - Meditation helps one to discipline one's mind, thereby reducing negative emotions
 - Cultivating a benevolent disposition toward others promotes peace of mind
 - Benefiting others would likely promote one's own peace of mind in several ways:
 - Through one's feelings of empathy (if one has empathy)
 - Through future reciprocation
 - Through facilitating friendships
 - Through a reputation for benevolence, which would increase the likelihood that others will act to one's benefit
 - Harming others would likely disturb one's mind in several ways:
 - Through one's feelings of empathy (if one has empathy)
 - Through fear of retaliation
 - Through actual retaliation
 - Through reputational costs
 - Through hindering friendships
 - Through fear of legal repercussions (if applicable)
 - Through actual legal repercussions (if applicable)
 - In benefiting (or at least not harming) others, one should follow the Platinum Rule: "Do unto others as you believe they want done unto themselves"
 - In most cases, the Platinum Rule reduces to the Golden Rule ("Do unto others as you would have them do unto you")
 - In cases where the two rules conflict, the Platinum Rule is usually superior, as it should usually maximize both the probability and magnitude of reciprocation
 - The level of short-term sacrifice that one should undertake when applying the Platinum Rule depends on several factors:
 - Expected frequency of interaction with the beneficiary: the more frequent, the higher the probability of reciprocation
 - Balance of power: the more power wielded by the beneficiary relative to the benefactor, the greater the effect of reciprocation
 - Perceived benefit of the action: the greater the perceived benefit to the beneficiary, the higher the probability and greater the effect of reciprocation
 - Tendency to reciprocate: the greater the tendency of the beneficiary to reciprocate, the higher the probability and greater the effect of reciprocation
 - Capacity for friendship: the greater the capacity for friendship with the beneficiary, the higher the probability of long-term benefits from friendship
 - Reputational impact: the more benevolent one's reputation, the more likely that others will act to one's benefit
 - Empathy: benefiting others improves one's state of mind through empathic feelings (if one has them)
 - While in theory, one should try to calculate the impact of each of one's actions on one's state of mind over one's lifetime, this is not feasible. Instead, it makes sense simply to cultivate a benevolent disposition toward others, mindful that the less significant the short-term sacrifice, the more likely it is to be in one's interest to make that sacrifice (all other things being equal).
 - Promoting peace of mind in those about whom one cares promotes one's own peace of mind

- One way this can be done is to teach them the methods for promoting peace of mind outlined in this document
- A policy of honesty and keeping promises promotes peace of mind
 - It is easier to remember the truth than lies—that is, telling lies complicates one’s life
 - If one has spoken or behaved dishonestly, one may fear getting caught, which would disturb one’s mind
 - The reputational costs of dishonest speech or behavior may be severe and long-lasting
- When one has been benefited by another, a policy of reciprocation promotes peace of mind
 - Reciprocation encourages further beneficial behavior by one’s benefactor
 - A reputation for reciprocation increases the chances that others will benefit oneself
 - Reciprocation facilitates friendships and can benefit one through empathic feelings (if one has them)
- When one has been harmed by another, a strong bias against retaliation promotes peace of mind
 - One should retaliate only for deterrence, not for retribution (as ultimate responsibility impossibilism removes any reason for retribution by eliminating culpability)
 - Retaliation should be considered only after all other reasonable alternatives to effect deterrence have been exhausted
 - The costs of retaliation—such as fear of further retaliation, actual further retaliation, empathic suffering (if one has empathy), fear of legal repercussions (if applicable), actual legal repercussions (if applicable), hindrance of friendships, and possible reputational costs—should be carefully weighed against the possible benefit of deterrence
 - If one determines that retaliation is appropriate, such retaliation should be the minimum necessary to act as an effective deterrent, as any excess retaliation would increase the costs of retaliation with no compensating benefit
- Abiding by the laws of one’s society promotes peace of mind
 - At a minimum, breaking the law may result in fear of punishment
 - Penalties for breaking the law are generally harsh, and would likely outweigh any benefits one would obtain from breaking the law
 - Most people underestimate the probability of getting caught, so if one thinks that one will get away with it, one should think again
 - The reputational costs of law-breaking can be severe and lifelong
 - Given the above factors, the benefits of breaking even a law with which one strongly disagrees might not outweigh the potential costs
- In a large polity, avoiding politics usually promotes peace of mind
 - Political activity may disturb one’s mind, and one’s personal efforts would likely have little or no ultimate effect in a large polity
 - Still, it may be rational to vote or donate to a political cause, as these are usually easy to do
- For further reading, I recommend:
 - *The Epicurus Reader*, by Epicurus and others, edited by Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson
 - *Epicurean Ethics*, by Peter Preuss
 - *A Guide to the Good Life*, by William Irvine
 - *Enchiridion*, by Epictetus
 - *The Philosophy of Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT)*, by Donald Robertson
 - *The Teaching of Buddha*, by Bukkyo Dendo Kyokai (Society for the Promotion of Buddhism)
 - *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao-tzu, translated by Stephen Mitchell
 - *Lieh-tzu*, by Eva Wong

Beyond peace of mind

- Once one has achieved peace of mind, positive emotions may enable one to feel even better
 - Recall that when one has achieved peace of mind, one does not have the *need* or *desire* to feel positive emotions. Nevertheless, one may still *prefer* to feel positive emotions.
 - Positive emotions such as love, camaraderie, serenity, cheerfulness, enjoyment, wonder, gratitude and amusement may confer significant long-term net benefits
 - Some positive emotions may not be worth pursuing, especially if they are fleeting, difficult to realize, involve the risk of increasing negative emotions in the long run, and/or involve the risk of shortening one's life. Examples may include frequent chocolate highs, the thrill of skydiving, the rush of being elected to public office, and drug-induced euphoria.
 - However, if a particular positive emotion provides benefits in excess of costs, one may sensibly indulge. Prudence and moderation are the keys.
- Simple and effective ways to generate positive emotions include:
 - Cultivating friendships
 - Benefiting others
 - Focusing on the positive
 - Savoring the small pleasures in life
 - Enjoying the outdoors
 - Listening to music
 - Focusing on one's love for a loved one
 - Spending time with friends and loved ones
 - Reading, watching, or listening to humorous material
 - Meditating
 - Practicing gratitude (reminding oneself of those things for which one feels fortunate)
 - Exercising physically
 - Recalling pleasant or humorous memories
 - Anticipating future enjoyable activities
- For further reading, I recommend *The How of Happiness*, by Sonja Lyubomirsky